

## Minutes for the meeting of the Mayor's Task Force for the Stamford Animal Control Center, July 9, 2014.

In attendance were Co-Chairs Eileen Heaphy and Art Layton; Director of Operations Theresa Geary, Ct Humane Society (CHS); Dr. Steve Zeide, Bull's Head Pet Hospital; Mary Ann Kleinschmitt, New Canaan Animal Control Officer; Brenden Leydon, Attorney, and Annie Selkowits Taylor, Stamford resident and dog owner. Public Health and Safety Director Ted Jankowski also was present. Many members of the public attended. Co-chair Layton called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM.

Co-chair Layton began by asking Ms. Kleinschmitt to review the euthanasia statistics for the New Canaan ACC because of some statements from the public. She gave the statistics from 2012 and back. Co-chair Layton reviewed euthanasia figures for New York City where, in 2012, 17% of cats and 16% of dogs were euthanized. In 2009, the figures had been higher—25% of dogs and 30% of cats. Co-chair Heaphy pointed out that the CT Department of Agriculture maintains statistics for all ACC's in Connecticut if people want to check out the figures.

Co-chair Layton then introduced the city's Legal Advisor/Corporation Counsel, Kathy Emmett, who discussed issues concerning liability for both the ACC and the volunteers. She said that from the city's perspective, the involvement of volunteers is a concern because of the lack of supervision and training. This problem was reflected in the lawsuit that has been brought against the city for a volunteer showing a Rottweiler to a prospective adopter, who was then bitten by the dog and required surgery. She also reminded the task force that volunteers could also sue the city. Volunteers at the ACC were doing activities that were not allowed, interacting with the public inappropriately, and collecting money for their own organization in a city facility. Liability has come from this unfortunate blurring of lines of authority.

Co-chair Layton then asked Dr. Zeide how employees at his veterinarian practice are trained. Dr. Zeide explained that employees are trained for several weeks before they are allowed any contact with the animals. There is ongoing training and monitoring of the employees.

Attorney Emmett suggested that the city needs much clearer guidelines on volunteers and separately needs a new ordinance on cats. In response to a question from Ms. Taylor about if we should use volunteers at all, Emmett said yes, but we have not yet been successful in working out how to use them. She added that volunteers signing waivers against liability would not necessarily hold up in a court case. For example, a volunteer could take out an animal for a walk and that dog ends up biting someone, the volunteer could end up liable for the damage.

Co-chair Layton introduced Allyson Halm, President of the Greenwich based Adopt-a-Dog and former Animal Control Office for the town of Greenwich. Ms. Halm said she is a resident of Stamford and knows the problems of the Stamford ACC—lack of budget, lack of sufficient paid

staff. The staff should not be cleaning out the kennels; there should be funds allotted for that. She said that ACC's have historically been the stepchild of most police departments and only recently have ACO's received weapons training.

Ms. Taylor commented that she was glad that Ms. Halm put blame on the city, not the volunteers. Ms. Halm said that her organization has taken dogs from the Stamford ACC; sometimes euthanasia is a humane solution for some animals. Co-chair Heaphy asked about Adopt-a-Dog's shelter in Westchester County. Halm explained that it is a shelter/sanctuary, but the organization decides which dogs it will accept. Adopt-a-Dog raises about \$800,000 through its fundraising activities to support the shelter. It houses 30-40 animals at a time.

In terms of the Greenwich ACC, Halm stated that it impounds about 300 animals a year, most of which are returned to their owners. Volunteers are limited. To make it a workable situation, there needs to be a separate in-take wing, waivers, and mandatory training. The ACO needs to be a strong leader that is firm with volunteers when they step out of bounds. A dog will often bond with a volunteer and then problems ensue if the animal is deemed unadoptable.

Co-chair Heaphy then introduced Marjean O'Malley, head of the Stratford Animal Rescue Society (STARS) who was invited because the CT Dept. of Agriculture had cited the partnership between STARS and the Stratford Animal Control Center as a role model of a working relationship between an ACC and a volunteer group. Ms. O'Malley started by explain that the relationship started 14 years ago and took several years to get right. First volunteers were not prepared and had too much access to the ACC. Now the ACC has a strong leader and the volunteers work about 8000 hours a year. Management has clear lines, volunteers do not have keys to the ACC, do not handle phone calls, and can only handle the animals after 12-16 hours of training with tests at the end. There is continual education and awareness that in a public facility, animals cannot always survive. She said that it is irresponsible to adopt out dogs that have a bite history. As with the Greenwich ACC, there is an intake wing where volunteers are not allowed. There the dogs are given the SAFER test and taught to be calm. They are walked with a double collar system.

O'Malley pointed out that the city and STARS have a hold harmless agreement that each volunteer needs to sign. STARS has liability insurance.

When asked about her volunteers, O'Malley pointed out that they are mainly women and retirees; they must be at least 18 yrs. old. Volunteers can't think that they are just walking dogs; they can't think that if a dog gets along with one person, that it will get along with other people. Consistency is the key to the ACC-volunteer relationship and with the volunteer-animal relationship.

Co-chair Heaphy asked about STARS budget. They raise about \$40,000 a year with fundraising events and a fall festival. Re adoptions, STARS insists that the whole family, including the family dog, come in to meet with prospective animal. It is better than adopting out the dog based on one family member's view and then having the dog returned because another family member (or the family dog) couldn't work with the adoptee. For adoptions, volunteers greet visitors and answer general questions. ACC staff gets the animal to present it to the potential

family and fills out all the paperwork. Halm also added that in Greenwich volunteers do not enter the kennel, only the staff; animals are brought out to the exercise area. Ms. Geary also volunteers that there must be strong leadership in both the ACC and volunteer organization to make the system work.

Ms. Kleinschmitt asked what STARS does if a volunteer oversteps boundaries. O'Malley responded that if it is a serious mistake, the volunteer is out. The ACO can dismiss any volunteer for not following procedures.

O'Malley left behind copies of her organization's volunteer guide, liability waiver, and volunteer manual as examples for our use.

Mr. Jankowski also mentioned that the Stamford ACC has one part-time unfilled position and has a serious need for technology upgrades. He will follow up to see what can be done.

Co-chair Layton set the next meeting date for Thursday, July 24, at noon, at the Government Center. The focus will be on ACC laws and regulations. Participants are expected to be from the Stamford Police Department, a representative from the CT Department of Agriculture and other TBD.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted  
Eileen Heaphy, Co-chair